

TOWN HALL MONTHLY: March

February is always busy for our office. Selectmen's and Budget Committee's budget work has to be entered into the State's electronic system and approved before it can be posted for the public to read before Town Meeting. All Town department and board annual reports need to be formatted into the Town Report booklet and gotten to the printer in time for distribution to voters before Town Meeting. It's a lot to coordinate and this year an added complication came from the State.

We've been talking for months about the FEMA Alternate Project in which the Town is being allowed to apply 2021 flood repair funds designated for Nye Road to Derry Hill Road. The Town Meeting warrant will include an article in which the voters will be asked to accept that proposal.

At the last minute the State's Department of Revenue (DRA) and Department of Homeland Security (HSEM) raised questions about the wording of the Alternate Project warrant article that was supplied to the Town by FEMA's legal team. As it turns out, New Hampshire has never encountered a FEMA Alternate Project before. Alternate Projects are not reimbursement projects. Instead, a certain amount of money is allocated by FEMA at the beginning rather than the Town needing to front the money. DRA and HSEM do not have processes for allocation funding; they only know how to accommodate reimbursement projects. As of this writing, the Town is working with Town Counsel to sort this out. We will have the results for Town Meeting.

At their February 17 meeting Selectmen will review the draft engineering study for the Forest Road Bridge replacement. As we've noted before the Board has endorsed the simplest of the design options presented to the Town. Nevertheless, project completion is now projected into 2027. This is a State Bridge Program project and as such 80% of the cost is covered by State and federal funding. Would we like it done sooner? Of course we would. However, the design the Town paid for several years ago could not withstand current storms and the new bridge is designed to do just that.

In the meantime, winter finally arrived during February with frequent, sometimes back to back storms. The Highway Department has kept up with roads despite numerous issues with our Dodge truck. To the Town's advantage, the crew will often juggle their hours to provide coverage without unnecessarily adding to the overtime budget line.

The Planning Board will make a presentation of the 2025 Master Plan update at their February 24 meeting and again at Town Meeting. From there the Board expects to begin work on a building code ordinance for 2026. This is a topic many were interested in at last year's Town Meeting and the Board hopes folks will join in their discussions which will take place over the coming year.

Town Meeting will be Tuesday, March 11. School District and Town officer voting takes place from 10AM to 7PM. Voting on Town business begins after that. Come, talk, listen and eat. See you there.

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